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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MSF RUSSIA: CHECHNYA IS STILL A HUMANITARIAN
CRISIS

REF: MOSCOW 396

Classified By: Minister Counselor for Political Affairs Kirk Augustine.
Reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) MSF-Russia asked us to meet with heads of mission from MSF-France (Manuel Lannaud) and -Belgium (Goran Svedin) January 20 to receive a report on the humanitarian situation in Chechnya (MSF-Holland HOM was out of Moscow). MSF declared that there was still a humanitarian crisis in Chechnya, and MSF opposed UNDP plans to make the transition from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction assistance. Lannaud stated that MSF has dissociated itself entirely from the UNDP plan, which MSF sees as a concession to Russian claims that the situation in Chechnya has normalized.

¶2. (C) Lannaud stated that according to MSF and official data, those IDPs who returned to Chechnya suffer worse health conditions than they did when living in tents in Ingushetia. Several years after their return, the former IDPs are still in "temporary accommodation centers" in Chechnya without basic utilities and services. The incidence of tuberculosis is 1.5-2 times higher in Chechnya than the national average. The psychological health of the population is still poor, with 80 percent having suffered or witnessed acts of violence. The main government trauma hospital in Groznyy still reports an average of two war-related injuries per day (gunshot wounds, mine explosions, etc.).

¶3. (C) MSF made the point that it is a humanitarian NGO and cannot participate in reconstruction efforts, despite the requests of local governments in the region. Though the health system in Chechnya is virtually non-existent outside Groznyy and MSF runs clinics and TB dispensaries of its own, MSF cannot help build hospitals or support the development of the Ministry of Health.

¶4. (C) Asked whether MSF has felt pressure concerning its registration, of the sort detailed in Reftel, the MSF officials said no: though they are often mentioned by Russian officials and commentators alongside such human rights NGOs as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International ("the troublemakers"), in practice on the ground they are treated as the purely humanitarian organization they claim to be. Lannaud said he had met with the Ingush government official in charge of liaison with NGOs, and said he could understand the difficulties others were having: the official viewed the NGOs as resource providers who could be directed to provide whatever resources the local government needed, according to plans and divisions of labor decided by the local government. Lannaud viewed the new Russian NGO law as a tool for local officials to reinforce this position.
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